THE BEAUTIFUL TEACHINGS OF ISLAM

The Clear Religion Series - Part 2

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NO DOUBT THIS LIFE IS AN EXAMINATION
WHICH NEEDS YOUR FULL CONSIDERATION
AS TO WHAT YOU WILL TAKE TO
YOUR FINAL DESTINATION
ONLY TRUE BELIEF AND GOOD DEEDS ARE
YOUR WAY TO SALVATION

(Muhammad Sherif)

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HONORIFIC PHRASES IN THIS BOOK

(bpuh): *Blessings and peace be upon him*; used after mention of the Prophet Muhammad

(pbuh): *Peace be upon him*; used after mention of any prophet or after mention of Angel Gabriel

ABOUT THE WORD ‘LORD’

The word *lord* in English has several related meanings. The original meaning is ‘master’ or ‘ruler’, and in this sense it is often used to refer to human beings: ‘the lord of the mansion’ or ‘*Lord* So-and-So’ (in the United Kingdom, for example). The word *Lord* with a capital L is used in the lexicon of Islam to refer to the One and Only God—Allah. In Islam, there is no ambiguity about the meaning of this word. While it is true that one may occasionally use the word *lord* (whether capitalized or not) to refer to a human being, in Islamic discourse the reference of this term is always clear from the context. Whereas for Christians, Hindus and other polytheists, the word *Lord* with a capital L may refer to Allah, to Jesus or to some imagined deity, for Muslims, there can be no plurality of meaning. Allah alone is the Lord, and the Lord is Allah—not Jesus, not Rama, not any other being.

ABOUT THE WORD ‘ALLAH’

Although the English word ‘God’ has often been used interchangeably in this book with the word Allah, there is a difference. ‘Allah’ is the word in Arabic that is translated as ‘God’. However, ‘Allah’ has a much more precise meaning than ‘God’. ‘Allah’ is not merely an Arabic term for the word ‘god’. Instead, the root word of the word ‘Allah’ is *ilah*, which means ‘a god’. There are countless numbers of made-up ‘gods’, but only One True God worthy of worship, Whose name is Allah. The word ‘Allah’ literally means ‘the worshipped’, or ‘the God’. Allah is, thus, the proper name for the **only Being that is worthy of worship in truth**, the True Creator of the universe. By saying ‘Allah’, Muslims are, in essence, negating every other entity which people wrongfully worship, while affirming worship to Him alone. The name ‘Allah’ is how God Almighty has referred to Himself in the Quran, and how Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) also referred to Him. Therefore, in this work, the term ‘Allah’ will often be used in reference to this One and Only God Who is worthy of worship.

INTRODUCTION

Some of the prophets sent by Allah, the Exalted, were supported by revealed books that were the basis of enlightenment for the people they were sent to. As a revelation from the Almighty, each of these books is easily distinguishable, in its characteristics, from books written by human beings.

The last of these books is the noble Quran, the primary source of Islamic teachings, which Allah Has promised to preserve from being altered. The sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) are the second source; they add to and detail the teachings of the noble Quran.

This booklet sheds light on the basic characteristics of those main two sources of Islamic teachings. It also includes a discussion of the Islamic moral system.

Islam has unique moral teachings that call for strengthening the relationship between humans and their Lord, as well as among one another. They also call for us to correct and improve ourselves, both inwardly and outwardly.

It should be noted that these moral teachings have been revealed from Allah; they are not a result of human work or experiences.

Enjoy the book.

Kind regards,

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1. THE SIX ARTICLES OF ISLAMIC FAITH

Islamic belief is based on six fundamental articles of faith.

1.1 Belief in Allah

This includes the following beliefs:

- Belief in Allah's existence: The existence of humankind and the entire universe is not a mere accident or the product of chance. The universe, and everything in it, manifests and points to the certainty of there being a Creator.
- Belief that Allah is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Owner of the universe and its contents, the Provider of everything, the Giver of life and the Causer of death.
- Belief that Allah is the only One Who has the right to be worshipped.
- Allah has revealed, both in His final revelation, the Quran, and through his Prophet's teachings, ninety-nine names and numerous attributes. They offer some insight into the absolutely unique, wondrous and perfect nature of Allah. The most frequently used name is Allah, which means 'the Worshipped'. Some of those attributes are: the Everlasting, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Hearing, All-Seeing, Self-Sufficient and Self-Sustaining. Allah Almighty is above all comprehension, and He does not resemble His creation, as He has said in the Quran:

{…There is nothing like unto Him…} *(Quran 42: 11)*

{Say: He is Allah, [Who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent.}

(Quran 112: 1-4)

He is the most Rich, free of all needs. He has said in the Quran:

{And I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me. I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me. Indeed, it is Allah who is the [continual] Provider, the firm possessor of strength.} *(Quran 51: 56-58)*

Allah's ninety-nine names and attributes have all been mentioned in the Quran and the statements of the Prophet (bpuh).

1.2 Belief in the angels

Angels are creatures created by Allah for specific functions. They are normally invisible and have no free will; they do as Allah commands them. They should not be worshipped. The angel Gabriel (pbuh) was responsible for conveying the revelation to the prophets. Two angels are assigned to every human being to record their good and evil deeds. Another angel accompanies each human being, encouraging him or her to do good deeds. Others blow the human spirit into the foetus four months after conception, and still others take the human spirit at the time of its

death, by Allah's permission. There are other angels that have various responsibilities.[1]

There are two main points of difference between the Islamic and Christian views of angels. In Islamic teachings, angels are noble and free of sin, yet righteous Muslims hold a greater status in the eyes of Allah. The angels were commanded to bow to Adam (pbuh) due to his superior knowledge, and they all did as they were commanded. Christians, on the other hand, believe that angels are of two kinds: good/obedient and evil/disobedient. That is how they justify their belief that Satan is a 'fallen angel'—an evil angel who disobeyed God.

According to Islamic belief, both angels and human beings are creatures of Allah, and both are obliged to worship Him. Angels have no choice, though; they worship Allah and never disobey Him, so they commit no sins. Thus, the second main point of difference between the Christian and Islamic views of angels is that of free will. Whereas angels have no free will, human beings do, so humans might choose to obey Allah, to be sinful, or to follow some commandments while disobeying others.

1.3 Belief in the scriptures

This article of faith refers to belief in all the scriptures as revealed in their original form by Allah to His messengers. Revealed scriptures form the

[1] For more detail, see al-Uthaymeen, *Explanation of the Three Fundamental Principles of Islaam*.

enlightenment which the messengers received to show their people the right path to Allah. All the revealed books call to the worship of Allah alone, and they forbid the worship of anything in place of, or in addition to, Him. They contain guidance for humankind in all aspects of life. They define right and wrong, and they offer human beings a complete system of beliefs and practices to govern all their affairs. The Creator alone knows best what is beneficial for His creation and what is not. Thus, the divine laws contained in those scriptures command and prohibit various acts and substances in order to protect the human spirit, human body, and human society from harm. Human beings need to abide by Allah's commandments, as documented in His revealed books, in order to fulfil their potential by living a righteous life.

The original texts of the revealed books do not differ from each other in their main doctrinal principles. However, due to the differences among nations in terms of time and place, there were some differences in the practical teachings (laws) of the scriptures, according to the wisdom of Allah. Their basic message, however, remains the same.

Muslims believe in the previous books as mentioned in the Quran: the Scripture of Abraham (pbuh), the Torah of Moses (pbuh), the Psalms of David (pbuh), and the Gospel of Jesus (pbuh). The following verse from the noble Quran emphasizes the fact that belief in all the previous scriptures sent by Allah is an integral part of the Islamic belief system:

{Say [O believers]: We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him.} *(Quran 2: 136)*

Long before the coming of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh), all of these scriptures had been either lost or irrevocably corrupted by later generations, over the centuries, with myths, superstitions, idolatry, and irrational philosophical beliefs. The existing forms of those scriptures contain contradictions and hence cannot be described as Allah's revelation.

The Bible, for example, is composed of many books written by various authors. The scripture that was revealed to Jesus (pbuh) has undergone so many changes that today we have the four well-known Gospels instead of one Gospel.

These were written between 40 and 115 years after Jesus (peace be upon him) had left and are based on documents that have been lost. The Gospel according to Mark was the first one written in Rome, at least 40 years after the disappearance of Jesus (peace be upon him). The Gospel according to Matthew was written in the Greek Language about 90 years after Christ. The Gospel according to Luke was written in Greece approximately 80 years after Christ. These three Gospels are called Synoptic because they originate from the same lost document and they have a lot in common. The Gospel according to John, on the other hand, has deep differences

with the Synoptic Gospels. It is in this Gospel of John where the Divinity and pre-existence of Jesus (peace be upon him) was mentioned, even though Jesus himself never claimed this. This Gospel was written between the years 110 and 115 CE.[2]

Analysis of these Gospels reveals the following:

1. There exist no written documents dating from the period of Jesus' lifetime that record his sayings, actions, or lectures.
2. The Gospels were written 40-115 years after Jesus' 'disappearance' and were based on documents that have since been lost. As a consequence, there was manipulation of the content.
3. The historical record of the Gospels points to the fact that they were written by people who never knew, saw, heard, or met Jesus. (They are named as Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, although their actual identities are not known.) What they narrated as the Gospels was actually based on what they heard from the preceding generations. This points to the fact that the original message revealed to Jesus, which was in his possession, did not exist later (after his ascension). Otherwise, there would be no need for people to write it.
4. The Gospels were written in Greek, whereas Jesus (pbuh) spoke Aramaic; since they do not

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[2] Abdul Razak, *Study Guide, Comparative Study — Islam and Christianity*.

record his original speech, they cannot be the words of Allah.

5. For at least 100 years after the Gospels were written, they did not have any canonical authority. During this time, writers from different sects changed them in order to suit their own agendas.
6. The clearest evidence of biblical distortion is the revision of the Bible to the extent that every edition is different from the previous one.
7. There is a lack of authentication in documenting the original text of the Bible.
8. The present Gospels, seen as a whole, are full of contradictions.[3]

These factors have been brought up here in order to demonstrate that the Gospel of Jesus (pbuh), meaning his original message that was revealed by Allah, has not reached us in its original form. It can be affirmed that the four Gospels included in today's Bible cannot be considered equivalent, or even similar, to the inspired message given to Jesus (pbuh). Based on these historical facts, these four Gospels should be treated as historical writings, like the other books in the New Testament, not as the true scripture (word of Allah) that was revealed to Jesus.[4]

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[3] Source for points 1-7: Caraballo, *My Great Love for Jesus Led Me to Islam*, 14-15.

[4] At one time, there were a number of Gospels, but only four are accepted as part of today's Bible. Some scholars believe that these were chosen by the First Council of Nicaea, convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine in 325 CE.

Distortion of the Old Testament

Moving to the Old Testament texts, there are many verses that describe the Lord with weak and negative attributes. Some of them are even curses! This clearly indicates that the Old Testament cannot be the word of God because the Lord would not undermine Himself in the books He revealed to His people. The Lord is perfect, and hence His book must be perfect and free from contradictions.

In the twelve passages cited below, a series of nine examples prove conclusively to the sincere researcher that the current Old Testament is not the true Old Testament, the revelation that was in Jesus' hands. It is the word of 'men', not the word of 'God', the Lord.[5]

1. Here it says that the Lord acted as if he had slept and drunk wine! If this verse is true, then who controlled the universe while He acted this way?

   Then the Lord **awoke** as from sleep, like a strong man shouting because of **wine.** (Psalm 78:65)

2. Here it says that the Lord will not hear. This is not an appropriate characteristic for Allah.

   Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you **will not hear**? (Habakkuk 1:2)

3. Here it says that the Lord forgets.

   How long, O Lord, Will you **forget** me forever? (Psalm 13:1)

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[5] The great researcher Ahmed Deedat had a book titled *50,000 Errors in the Bible*, which is available online.

4. Here the Bible says that the Lord was not strong enough to displace some people because their chariots were made of iron.

   And the Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but **he could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had chariots of iron**. (Judges 1:19)

5. Here it attributes more negative characteristics to the Lord.

   Therefore will I lament and howl: I will go **stripped and naked**: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and a mourning like the ostriches. (Micah 1:8)

6. These two verses say that the Lord got tired after creating the heavens and earth and then had to rest. This attribute fits the human being, not the Lord, Who is the Most Strong.

   …In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day **he rested** and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:17)

   And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and **he rested** on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. (Genesis 2:2)

But the following verse contradicts the previous two verses:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. **He does not faint**

> **or grow weary**; his understanding is unsearchable. (Isaiah 40:28)

7. Here it says that the Lord will sound the trumpet. Is this fit for the Lord?

   > …The Lord God **will sound the trumpet** and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south. (Zechariah 9:14)

8. Here it implies that the Lord has failed and is hurt.

   > For thus says the Lord: “Behold, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and I will bring distress on them, that they may feel it.” Woe is me because of my hurt! My wound is grievous. But I said, “Truly this is an affliction, and I must bear it.” My tent is destroyed, and all my cords are broken; my children have gone from me, and they are not; there is no one to spread my tent again and to set up my curtains. (Jeremiah 10:18-20)

9. Psalm 89:38-46 describes the Lord acting badly against Jesus!

   > 38 But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed.
   >
   > 39 You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.
   >
   > 40 You have breached all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

41 All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbours.

42 You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

43 You have also turned back the edge of his sword, and you have not made him stand in battle.

44 You have made his splendor to cease and cast his throne to the ground.

45 You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame.

46 How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

10. Here is the cursing of a prophet (Balaam) in the Bible! Could this be the word of God? Could it happen that God sends a prophet and then rebukes him for his transgressions and then accuses him of not being in his right mind?

    but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Peter 2:16)

11. Genesis 19:30-38 narrates a very wicked story about a prophet (Lot). According to this, his daughters got him drunk and then had sexual relations with him while he was unaware of it; they both bore children as a result. Even a very indecent person would not do this.

12. Here is a Biblical curse for the Prophet Solomon:

> Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. (1 Kings 11: 1-6)

There are hundreds of verses in the Bible which are against logic and common sense.

Biblical proofs of the Bible's distortion

The Old Testament itself clearly testifies that it was altered by humans. God (Allah) is quoted as saying:

> How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us'? But behold, **the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie**. (Jeremiah 8:8)

Who distorted the Bible (Old and New Testaments)?

Dr Bilal Philips has explained:

About five years after the end of Jesus' ministry, a young rabbi by the name of Saul of Tarsus, who claimed to have seen Jesus in a vision, began to change Jesus' way. Paul (his Roman name) had considerable respect for Roman philosophy and he spoke proudly of his own Roman citizenship. His conviction was that non-Jews who became Christians should not be burdened with the Torah in any respect. The author of Acts 13:39 quotes Paul as saying: And by him every one that believes is freed from everything which you could not be freed by the Law of Moses. It was primarily through the efforts of Paul that the Church began to take on its non-Jewish character. Paul wrote most of the New Testament letters (epistles), which the Church accepts as the official doctrine and inspired Scripture. These letters do not preserve the Gospel of Jesus or even represent it, instead, Paul transformed the teachings of Christ into a Hellenic (Greco-Roman) philosophy.[6]

Based on these facts, it can easily be concluded that the Bible in its present form is no more than a collection of historical books written by various writers over many years. The accounts of the life of Jesus were written after his ascension, by men who never met him. (They are named as Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, although their actual

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6 Philips, *The True Message of Jesus Christ*, 52-53.

identities are not known.) These are partial accounts, which contradict each other and have no authentication. The current version(s) of the Bible does not represent the original revelations and cannot be described as the word of God (Allah).

Many Christians have found that when they do research to discover the true teachings of God, the Bible cannot answer their questions. Dr David Liepert is a Canadian physician who began learning about Islam in order to convince Muslim co-workers that his Christian beliefs represented the truth. As he combed through the Bible, however, he was surprised to find that it did not contain the evidence for his beliefs that he had assumed was there. After a great deal of soul-searching, and extensive research into Islam, he realized that it had the strongest evidence supporting it, and he embraced Islam as the true religion. His story is described in his book *Choosing Faith*.

Although the original revelations were not preserved and have been replaced with the current Bible (including the four Gospels attributed to Luke, Matthew, John, and Mark), the Old and New Testaments still contain some remnants of the original truth. The Quran confirms these parts, because it confirms the truth and denies all falsehood. Islamic teachings set out a criterion for either accepting or rejecting passages from the Bible, as described in the following verse:

{And We have revealed to you [O Muhammad] the book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the scripture and as a criterion over it...} *(Quran 5: 48)*

This verse emphasizes two main aspects of the Quran:

1) The Quran confirms only those teachings or passages of the previous scriptures whose meaning have remained intact.
2) The Quran is the final, complete, authoritative, and authentic revelation from Allah. It is the final arbiter and the only criterion to correct any inaccuracy or misinterpretation which might have occurred in the transmission of scriptures throughout the ages. It helps us to discover, expose, and disclose human additions to, or interpolations of, previous revelations. Indeed, one of the names of the Quran is *al-Furqan* (the criterion which distinguishes between right and wrong, truth and falsehood).

It follows, therefore, that Muslims have no reason to reject the essence of any passage in the Bible if such a passage is confirmed by the Quran. For example, we read in the New Testament a reiteration of one of the Ten Commandments:

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: **The Lord our God, the Lord is one**. (Mark 12:29)

Muslims who read this passage in the Bible can find no objection to its essence. After all, the Quran confirms:

{Say: He is Allah, [Who is] One.} *(Quran 112: 1)*

{They have certainly disbelieved who say, "Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary," while the Messiah has said, "O Children of Israel, worship Allah, **my Lord and your Lord**." Indeed, he who associates others with Allah – Allah has forbidden him Paradise, and his refuge is the fire. And there are not for the wrongdoers any helpers.}

(Quran 5: 72)

If, however, Muslims read in the Bible (or in other previous scriptures, for that matter) accusations of major moral sins levied against great prophets, or doctrines which are totally negated in the Quran, they can accept only the Quranic version as the original unadulterated truth, revealed by Allah.

Distorting revelations is the biggest sin

The Quran has emphasized, in more than one verse, that distorting Allah's revelation is a severe sin.

{So woe to those who write the 'scripture' with their own hands, then say: This is from Allah—in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn.} *(Quran 2: 79)*

An important note

It should be noted that those who followed the scriptures in their pure and unadulterated forms, and then died before hearing the message of Islam, are considered to be on the right religion; they will have nothing to fear on the Day of Judgement.

Revelation of the Quran

Following the distortion of the previous scriptures, Allah, the Most Compassionate, did not leave human beings to go astray without an unadulterated reference. Indeed, He revealed the Quran as the final revelation to humankind, and He promised to preserve it for all time. It is the word of Allah, which He revealed to Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) through the angel Gabriel (pbuh). It was revealed in parts (fragments) of different lengths over a period of twenty-three years. Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) recited the revelation to his Companions, who wrote it down during his lifetime on palm leaves, parchment, animal bones (the shoulder-blades of camels made a good writing surface), and flat stones. When he recited it to them, he indicated precisely where each revealed section belonged within the body of the complete revelation. In addition, the Quran was memorized by hundreds of Prophet Muhammad's Companions. One year after the death of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) in 632 CE, the first caliph, Abu Bakr (d. 634 CE, may Allah be pleased with him), instructed the Prophet's Companions to collect the whole Quran in one volume. Later, the third caliph, Uthman (d. 656 CE, may Allah be pleased with him), prepared several copies from the original text and sent them to the major centres of the Islamic civilization. One of these reproductions can still be found in Istanbul, Turkey.

From that time onwards, for more than 1400 years, the same Quranic text has been in use, with the exact same wording, order, and language (Arabic). Not a single word of its 114 chapters,

6200 verses, and approximately 80,000 words has been changed since it was revealed.[7] Indeed, Allah has promised to preserve it forever:

{Indeed, it is We who sent down the Quran and indeed, We will be its guardian.} *(Quran 15: 9)*

Just ponder over the fact that the Quran, in its entirety, is memorized by millions of people, regardless of age, sex, social class, or ethnicity! It is the only book that has been thus preserved, not only on the shelf but in the hearts of humankind.

The Quran supersedes all previous scriptures. Allah has said to Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) about it:

{And We have revealed to you [O Muhammad] the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the scripture and as a criterion over it…} *(Quran 5: 48)*

An essential point to understand about the Quran is that it is a miracle in terms of both its revelation and its content. Since the time of its revelation, there have been those who denied the divine and miraculous nature of the Quran, saying that Muhammad (bpuh) was either taught by others or that he wrote it by himself! In order to counteract this claim, Allah has presented a challenge to the whole of humankind:

{And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our slave [Muhammad], then produce a

[7] This refers to the original Arabic Quran. There are differences in its translations because they are merely interpretations of its meaning by different individuals.

chapter the like thereof and call upon your witnesses other than Allah, if you should be truthful.}

(Quran 2: 23)

This is one of the prophecies which the Quran accurately foretold, for no one, from the time of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) until this day, has been able to produce the like of one chapter or even one verse of the Quran. As such, Muslims do not need any other scriptures to base their faith on, either fully or partially. The Quran remains clear and easily understood by anyone who has a good command of the Arabic language, and even when the meanings of its words are translated into any of the world's other languages, all of its legal injunctions and instructions are clear.

The entire Quran is a proclamation of monotheism

1. Some of the verses inform us about Allah: His names, attributes, acts, and speech. Those verses indicate the Oneness of Allah with respect to His most excellent names, essence, and perfect attributes.
2. Other verses point to the necessity of worshipping Allah alone, without any associate or partner, and of renouncing the worship of anything other than Him. These verses indicate the focus of worship and the necessity for people to single out their Lord in their intentions, when requesting His help and when turning to Him in repentance, for example.

3. The Quran also contains injunctions and prohibitions; doing something that has been enjoined or refraining from what has been prohibited is the fulfilment and perfection of the affirmation of the Oneness of Allah.
4. The Quran includes stories and information about prophets and other righteous people of true and sincere belief. It tells about their immediate rewards in the life of this world as well as the immense rewards reserved for them in the hereafter.
5. The Quran also contains stories about those who associate partners with Allah. It describes their punishment in this life and the punishment they are promised in the hereafter. These are the just deserts for those who deviate from the affirmation of Allah's Oneness.

The Prophet's teachings

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) are the second source of Islamic knowledge, after the noble Quran. They explain and elaborate on the Quranic verses. They also explain, in minute detail, the manner of worship as performed by the Prophet (bpuh). The Prophet's statements provide further clarification and details as to how to fulfil what Allah has ordered and refrain from what He has forbidden. These teachings have been meticulously collected and reported by the Prophet's Companions (may Allah be pleased with all of them).

Preservation of Islamic teachings

Preventing Islamic teachings from alteration does not stop at the preservation of the Quranic text; it is also forbidden to introduce into the Prophet's guidance (by saying or writing) anything that is contrary to its premise, values, or teachings.

The Prophet (bpuh) said:

«Whoever introduces into this matter (the Islamic teachings) something that does not belong to it, shall find it rejected.» (Recorded by Bukhari and Muslim)

«One of the Prophet's Companions said: The Prophet (bpuh) gave us a highly effective admonition, such that many of us were tearful and felt our hearts shudder.

Someone said to him: O Messenger of Allah! This sounds like the admonition of someone bidding his audience farewell. Please outline for us what you recommend.

The Prophet (bpuh) said: I urge you to always remain conscious of Allah (God-fearing), and to listen to and obey your leaders, even if the leader is an Abyssinian slave. Any of you who lives long will witness much strife and conflict, so hold tight to my way and the way followed by the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.[8] Hold on to it and bite it with your molars (do not let go of it), and steer away from any innovation (in religious affairs and laws), for such innovations are deviations (from the right path).» (An authentic hadith recorded by Ibn Hibban, Abu Dawood, and Tirmidhi)[9]

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[8] He meant specifically the four caliphs who came after him.

Thus, in matters of religion, one is not permitted to change fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. Whatever is contrary to them is wrong and unacceptable. With this strict protection, Islam has been kept as it was revealed, pure from myths and superstitions as well as from changes that reflect the whims of people and leaders.

1.4 Belief in the messengers of Allah

Allah has conveyed His message through prophets and messengers, individual human beings who were selected by Allah to be examples of how the scriptures were to be understood and implemented. Prophets demonstrated practically, for their followers, how they should live in accordance with the law. The way of the prophets is the only way to Allah, because it is the way prescribed by Allah Himself. Without prophets, people would not know Allah, His attributes, or how to worship Him.

The role of the prophets can be summarized as follows:

1. Receive the message from Allah.
2. Deliver this message to the people.
3. Advise people to fear Allah and abide by His commandments.
4. Advise people who have deviated, disobeyed Allah, or worshipped anything or anyone other

[9] hadith: a statement or action of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) that was remembered and recorded by his Companions and followers.

than Him, to repent and to obey and worship Him only.

5. Inform people about the fundamental aspects of faith.
6. Teach detailed religious and moral tenets to their followers.
7. Be a model for their people, and lead them to eternal paradise.

Allah, the Exalted, has sent a prophet or prophets to every nation; their duty was to convey the message that He alone should be worshipped and that worshipping anything instead of, or along with, Him is false and unacceptable. The Quran and Hadith have mentioned twenty-seven prophets (see Illustration 1), while indicating that many others existed but were not mentioned by name. The first of these prophets was Adam, and the last was Muhammad (bpuh). May Allah's mercy and peace be upon all the prophets.

Every prophet was sent to a specific people and a specific era. For example, in the present day Bible, Jesus says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) was an exception in that he was sent as the last and final messenger until the hour of judgement. The proofs that Muhammad (bpuh) was a messenger of Allah are innumerable, and all have been mentioned in detailed biographical material about his life. The greatest proof is the miracle of the Quran, which could not have been written by any human and

could not have been conveyed by anyone other than a Messenger of Allah (bpuh).

Indeed, the books of the Bible mention the coming of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh), in spite of the changes which have been introduced in their content.[10]

The Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) relate, with reverence, the lives of many of these prophets. Prophet Muhammad (bpuh), the last prophet, remains the absolute example for his followers, and his teachings were further elucidated through the practice of his Rightly-Guided successors. The Prophet (bpuh) continuously encouraged his followers to follow his way, and he warned against conflict over Islamic principles and values. This was to ensure that his followers would not deviate from the right path, as did the followers of previous prophets.

Prophet Muhammad's followers owe him two things: obedience and love.

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[10] See Chapter 15 of al-Rassi, *The Amazing Prophecies of Muhammad (bpuh) in the Bible: Twenty-Eight Proofs from the Bible of Muhammad's Prophethood*.

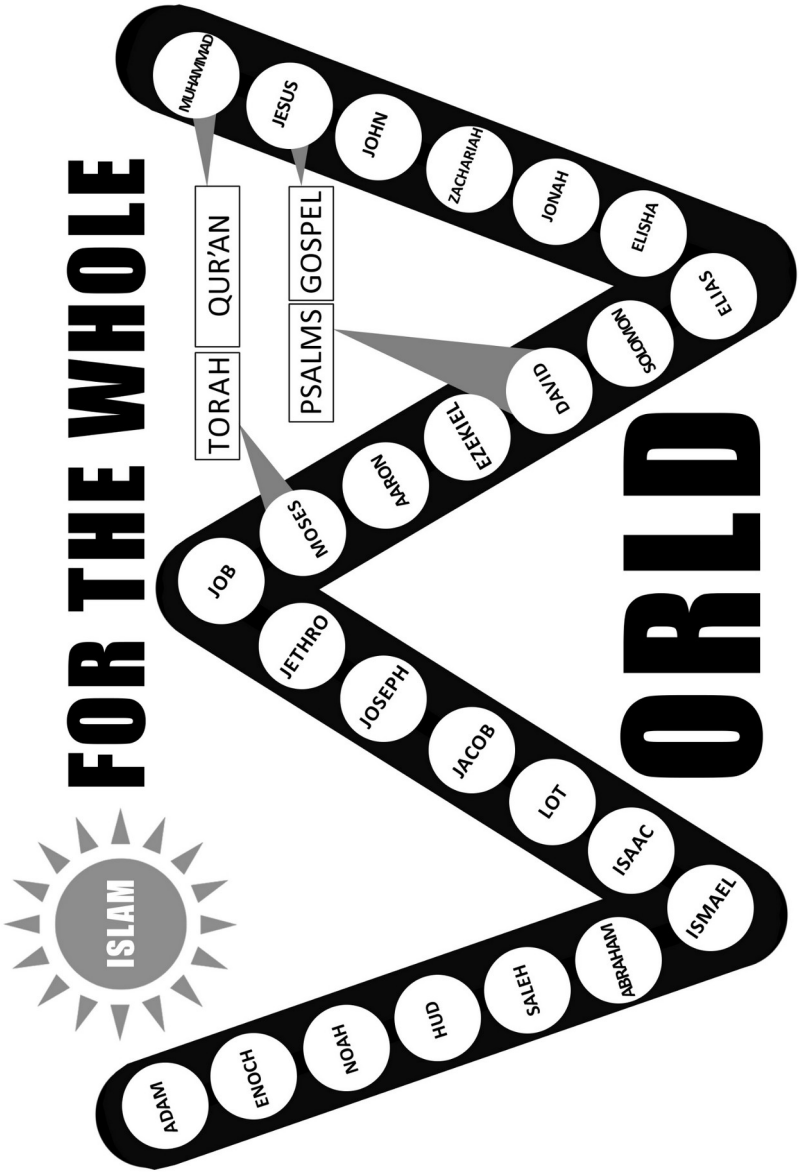

Illustration 1: The prophets mentioned by name in the Quran. Joshua is also listed

here, although he was named in the Hadith and not in the Quran.

Obedience to the Prophet (bpuh)

Obedience to the Prophet (bpuh) has been mentioned in thirty different verses of the Quran. It implies following his commands and avoiding what he prohibited. Obedience to the Prophet (bpuh) indicates the true fulfilment of the second part of the declaration that brings a person into Islam, "I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger."

When we examine what the Prophet (bpuh) encouraged, urged, or ordered, we find that it is all from Allah and that it leads to something good for us personally, for others who are close to us, for our families, or for our wider community, whether it is the Muslim community in general or humanity at large. He has only prohibited what is harmful or of no benefit, such as adultery, gambling, drinking alcohol, lying, being disrespectful to parents, and so on. In many statements, the Prophet (bpuh) prohibited satanic ways such as these because these tend to pull a person away from the right path.

Good believers reach a state of mind in which their desires and pleasures in this life are in line with what Allah wants from them. Every individual should be obedient to Allah and His Prophet (bpuh) and should strictly observe the instructions from Allah. One's faith develops and grows through following Islamic teachings and performing acts of worship, whereas it decays and suffers from a

spiritual loss if these teachings and acts of worship are abandoned.[11]

Loving the Prophet (bpuh)

Islam teaches that loving the Prophet is part of the Islamic faith. The Prophet (bpuh) has been quoted as saying:

«None of you is a true believer unless I am dearer to him than his parents, his children, and all other people.»

(Recorded by Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (bpuh) also said:

«There are three qualities which are certain to give anyone the sweetness of faith: to love Allah and His Messenger more than anyone else, to love a person for no purpose other than for Allah's sake, and to hate to relapse into disbelief after Allah has saved him from it as much as one would hate to be thrown into the fire.»

(Recorded by Bukhari and Muslim)

We are required to love Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) more than all others (except Allah) because it was through him that we learned Who Allah is, along with His attributes, our position in relation to Him, what He wants from us, and how to worship Him. The Prophet (bpuh) has guided us, through practical examples, along the way; following him is certain to earn us Allah's acceptance and the ultimate bliss. He has spared us the worst calamity that can ever befall anyone, which is incurring

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[11] Compiled from Caraballo, *My Great Love for Jesus Christ Led Me to Islam*.

Allah's anger and punishment. He sacrificed everything— his health, his wealth, and his whole life—to deliver Allah's message to us. If we realize all this, how can we not love him more than we love ourselves and all others?

We love Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) because he was, as described in the Quran, a 'mercy for all nations'. His compassion extended to all, whether they were friends or enemies. Consider this: his enemies often had a change of heart and became his beloved Companions and followers. They embraced Islam, saying that his character proved he was a true Messenger of Allah (bpuh).

It should be noted that we must love Allah more than we love the Prophet (bpuh); the Prophet (bpuh) comes only after Allah. Loving Allah, the Prophet (bpuh), and his followers is an act of worship for which we will be rewarded. The reverse is also true: hating Allah or His Prophet (bpuh) will expel us from the bounds of Islam. Correspondingly, hating those who hate Allah or the Prophet (bpuh) is part of Islamic belief, for which we will be accounted and rewarded.

It needs to be clarified here that the emotion of 'hate' that is referred to in this context is not the commonly known, evil type of hate which is an imperfect human emotion; rather, it is the type of hate that perfects one's faith when directed—in the right measure—against those who take a defiant stance against the Creator and His chosen messengers. It is a lot like the negative feeling one has towards the actions of a person who

defies and abuses his or her elderly parents in an evil manner, or towards the efforts of an outlaw who fights the justice system and spreads fear and corruption in society. It is clear that hating the actions of such individuals is a natural feeling that good people are expected to have. Although Islam teaches love in all its forms, it also instructs faithful believers not to love those who do not love Allah and His messengers, until they change their ways—in which case, they are commanded to love them! In a nutshell, a Muslim loves and hates for Allah's sake. Here is an important fact about this emotion of hate: a Muslim is instructed not to hate anyone for personal reasons. If a Muslim is insulted by anyone, he or she is encouraged to forgive; surely, there is a great difference between hate for the sake of Allah (a well-placed emotion) and hate for self-satisfaction (a destructive emotion). Keep in mind that expressing our feelings of hate or revulsion at the refusal of our fellow human beings to believe in Allah's Oneness and to follow the monotheistic teachings of His prophets should be part of a positive and pro-active approach to those who disbelieve. We pray for them to be guided to the truth; at the same time, we need to work for that and work with them towards that.

The love we should have for the Prophet (bpuh) must be genuine love, not a mere verbal statement. It should be supported and proven by our obedience, by following his commands and avoiding what he prohibited.

1.5 Belief in the Last Day

Islam teaches that this life is only a test of conduct for each of us, to see whether or not we will follow the commands of Allah. In the hereafter, we all will be resurrected to stand before Allah for a just reckoning of the deeds and actions we performed during our life on this earth. People with good deeds will be generously rewarded and warmly welcomed to Allah's heaven, but those whose records are overwhelmed with bad deeds will be punished and cast into hell. We have been given knowledge of right and wrong, instinctively and through revelation; we must choose our own path in this short life. Our choices in this life will ultimately determine our places in the eternal life to come. Allah has said in the Quran:

{So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.} *(Quran 99: 7-8)*

Belief in the Day of Judgement causes the consciousness of Allah to be implanted in the human heart. It impels individuals and society at large to obey Him sincerely, without any external pressure.

In effect, the hereafter for any individual starts right after his or her soul departs from the body. Shortly after the burial, two angels come to the grave and ask the following three questions (as in a final examination):

Who is your Lord?

What is your religion?

Who is your prophet?

Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) said that the believer (one who believes in all six articles of faith) will not have any difficulty answering these questions correctly, while the unbeliever will not be able to do so. Depending upon the result, the deceased will begin either to suffer or to enjoy his or her stay in the grave, which will either expand (to give comfort to) or contract (to torture) its occupant. (As narrated in hadiths recorded by Bukhari and Ahmad)

1.6 Belief in predestination

This includes the following beliefs:

a) Allah knows everything. His knowledge is not bound by time; the past, present, and future are all known to Him.

b) Everything that takes place is already written in a book called the 'Preserved Tablet'.

c) Allah has created everything, including our actions, both good and bad. He has commanded us to do good deeds, though, and has forbidden us from doing evil; hence we will be rewarded or punished based on our choice of good or bad actions.

d) Everything that happens in this universe is happening with Allah's permission, and nothing can take place against His will.

It should be noted that Allah's prior knowledge is not the same as control; it does not mean that we human beings have no free will. We choose, but Allah knows in advance what choices we will make

and what actions we will take. He merely **allows** us to follow through with our decisions.

2. THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Worship in Islam is an all-inclusive term encompassing all of the actions and statements that Allah loves and approves of. Every virtuous action that is performed with the intention of carrying out His commandments and seeking His pleasure is considered to be an act of worship. Islam is built on five acts of worship that make up the foundation on which all other deeds rest. These five pillars have a high importance in Islam; learning and practicing them are priorities for every Muslim, whereas everything else can be learned gradually, with patience and dedication. These five pillars stand as the framework of spiritual life, on which the structure of Islam rests:

2.1 The declaration of the two testimonies of faith

"I testify that there is no deity[12] worthy of worship except Allah, and I testify that Muhammad (bpuh) is His slave and messenger."[13] The sincere declaration of this double testimony (also referred to as the testimony of monotheism) and adherence to this teaching automatically brings one into the fold of Islam, and dying while believing it guarantees a place in paradise. That is why this testimony is considered to be the cornerstone of Islam. The acceptance of this belief distinguishes the Muslim from the non-Muslim, so all

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12 deity: an object of worship.

13 In Arabic: *Ash-hadu al-la ilâha illa Allah, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan Abduhu wa Rasooluhu*.

actions depend upon this pillar; good deeds (no matter how great) are of no avail to anyone who does not utter this testimony. On the other hand, there are many actions that contradict this declaration, automatically taking one outside the fold of Islam. The most serious of those acts is worshipping other than Allah, whether through supplication, prayer, or any other act that signifies worship or belief in an entity other than Allah.

2.2 Prayers

Formal prayers are prescribed five times daily as a duty to Allah, the Exalted, at the following times: dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. Prayer provides people with regular contact with Allah, which helps them avoid evil. This act of worship compels the believers to remember their Lord night and day, no matter where they are. These prayers take place continuously, so that at any given moment, people are praying somewhere in the world. Muslim males are enjoined to pray in congregation in a mosque, while females are encouraged to pray in their homes, but a Muslim may offer formal prayers almost anywhere as long as the location is clean. Furthermore, it is symbolic of equality among the poor and the rich, the ruler and the subjects, the dark-skinned and the fair-skinned. Human beings from every conceivable background stand together shoulder to shoulder, united in rows, prostrating themselves before Allah. Prayer strengthens the belief in Allah and elevates people to a higher morality. It helps to purify the heart and to prevent them from giving in to temptation to engage in wrongdoing and evil.

2.3 *Zakah* (obligatory charity)

Every Muslim whose net annual savings are above a certain specified minimum must pay 2.5% of those savings annually to the poor or needy people in the community.[14] Zakah fosters generosity and helps purify the soul of selfishness and greed. Zakah also helps reduce resentment and envy between the poor and the rich members of the society. Islam is a practical religion. Not only does it safeguard the average individual and his or her rights, but it protects the rights of the weaker members of the community as well.

2.4 Fasting the month of Ramadan

In Islam, fasting means abstinence from food, drink, and marital relations from dawn to sunset. It is an annual obligation during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Fasting was imposed on former communities of believers in earlier divine religions. The Quran states that the main purpose of fasting is to help us be more conscious of Allah and more obedient to Him. It teaches sincerity and engenders devotion. It helps us develop a sense of social conscience, patience, self-restraint, willpower, and compassion for needy members of the society.

Someone might ask: Why has Allah, in His wisdom, prescribed fasting for many nations?

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[14] There are also different amounts due for livestock, crops, inventory, etc.; the details are beyond the scope of this book.

The answer is that the purpose of fasting is clearly defined as being for the development of Allah-consciousness (piety) in the believer's heart, since only Allah knows who is actually fasting and who is not. Consequently, the one who is fasting refrains from eating and drinking based on an awareness of Allah. Regular fasting enhances that awareness, which subsequently leads to the implanting of righteousness in the heart of the individual.

As a secondary benefit, fasting is very good for one's health. It purifies the body of toxins; it is a rest from the useless waste cluttering the body. It allows the body to recuperate and heal. It trains the body, as well as the mind, to function with an amount of food that is sufficient. Also, the needs of basic instincts of survival are kept in check, and when the individual is able to control these, other needs are easier to control. In return for this sacrifice, Allah grants the believers great rewards and forgives their sins.

2.5 Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah)

The Hajj is obligatory for every Muslim once in a lifetime, if one can afford it financially and bear it physically. During the Hajj, Muslims from all corners of the world meet in an international congregation dedicated to the worship of Allah. The Hajj lasts for days (not including travel to and from Makkah), during which several million pilgrims perform certain rites in specific places at specific times; as such, it is a great lesson in patience but also brings magnificent spiritual

rewards. The huge gatherings for the Hajj are a reminder of the Day of Judgement, when all of humankind will gather for their reckoning. It emphasizes the belief that all Muslims are brothers and sisters, irrespective of their geographical, cultural, racial or social origins.

3. MAIN ASPECTS OF THE MORAL SYSTEM IN ISLAM

Islam has unique moral teachings that call for strengthening the relationship between humans and their Lord, as well as with one another. They also call for us to correct and improve ourselves, both inwardly and outwardly.

3.1 Relationship with the Lord

In the Quran, Allah calls us to correct and strengthen our relationship with Him and to draw close to Him through spiritual and physical acts of worship such as prayer, Hajj,[15] supplication, and charity. In addition, the Quran calls us to seek knowledge about Allah through His names and attributes. This instils fear and awe of the Lord in our hearts and establishes discipline in applying Allah's commands and prohibitions.

> The Prophet (bpuh) also instructed us to remember Allah at all times and in every situation. This creates a permanent connection between our Lord and us, and it instils stability, strength and tranquillity in our hearts. It is one means of protecting against evil and vice, since Muslims will be reminded constantly that Allah is watching our every action. The Prophet (bpuh), for example, taught specific invocations to be uttered when going to sleep; before entering the lavatory; before sexual intercourse; while travelling; when in a state

[15] Hajj: the major pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque, site of the Kaaba in Makkah, to be undertaken by every able Muslim once in his or her lifetime.

of fear; upon entering or leaving one's house; the first thing in the morning and in the afternoon; when afflicted by distress, anxiety, or misfortune; when burdened by debt or poverty; upon entering a graveyard; when stopping for a rest or setting up camp; and in many other situations.

3.2 Relationships with people in general

The Quran promotes behaviour that strengthens and reinforces social relationships; for example, it places great importance on the role of the family. Treating parents kindly, maintaining good relations with other family members, seeing to the rights and needs of spouses and children and dealing with them with love and mercy, and supporting orphans and the weaker members of society are all obligatory. Conversely, disobeying parents, severing family ties, neglecting or abusing spouses and children, and isolating oneself are all prohibited.

In addition, the Quran teaches that we should treat others with high moral behaviour and noble manners. We are encouraged to smile, forgive, return harm with good, and have patience when dealing with others. Since this high code of moral behaviour can be quite trying, Allah has promised immense rewards for those who achieve it.

The Prophet (bpuh) instructed us to adopt good manners when in gatherings, such as not raising our voices, respecting elders, being gentle with youngsters, and greeting those present by saying *Assalamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu* (May the peace, mercy and blessings of Allah be

upon you). Islam also demands that we guard our tongues against saying negative things about others, even if what we want to say is true.

Islam also enjoins that agreements and contracts be fulfilled, entrusted items returned, and rulers obeyed. It enjoins noble characteristics just as it forbids vileness, baseness, crime, oppression, hostility, aggression, and all other blameworthy and reprehensible qualities.

3.3 Relationships with parents

Islam highly recommends kindness to parents. This command is mentioned eight times in the Quran. In one of the verses, Allah said to Prophet Muhammad (bpuh):

{And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], 'uff', and do not repel them, but speak to them a noble word. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say: My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.} *(Quran 17: 23-24)*

«A man asked Prophet Muhammad (bpuh): Whom should I honour most?

The Prophet (bpuh) replied: Your mother.

The man asked: And who comes next?

The Prophet (bpuh) answered: Your mother.

The man inquired again: And who comes next?

The Prophet (bpuh) responded: Your mother.

The man queried again: And who comes next?

The Prophet replied: Your father.»

(Recorded by Bukhari and Muslim)

3.4 Relationships with other relatives

Kindness towards relatives has been promoted by most major religions, but Islam takes this aspect to a new dimension. We are obliged to assist our relatives through economic as well as social means. Relatives have specific rights laid out by the Sharia (Islamic law); these are based on the nearness of the blood relationship. This can be seen mostly in the rights of inheritors, which are specifically laid out in the Quran. Certain relatives receive shares of the inheritance, and a Muslim may bequeath up to one-third of the estate to relatives (or others) who are not assigned a share. When it comes to charity, one must fulfil the rights of relatives before donating money to others, so that members of one's own family are not forced to go elsewhere to seek help.

Muslims must treat all relatives—whether or not they are Muslims—with utmost respect and kindness; they must not boycott their relatives or cut off relations with them. They are encouraged to stay in contact even if these relatives abandon them. Indeed, maintaining family ties is of such great importance that Muslims are rewarded greatly for any good actions that promote this.

3.5 Relationships with neighbours

Islam encourages treating neighbours very kindly. There is a verse in the Quran that sums this all up:

{...and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler...} *(Quran 4: 36)*

Also, the Prophet (bpuh) said:

«(The angel) Gabriel continued to urge me to treat neighbours kindly and politely, to the extent that I thought he would order me to make them my heirs.» (Recorded by Bukhari and Muslim)

The Prophet (bpuh) also said:

«Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbour, and anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain guests generously, and anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should say what is good or keep quiet.»

(Recorded by Bukhari and Muslim)

Remember, kindness to neighbours is rewarded by Allah.

3.6 Food — moral conduct

The Prophet (bpuh) taught many practical good manners, including the virtue of adopting the correct manners for eating and drinking. These include eating with your right hand and being satisfied with the food rather than finding fault with it. If you like the food, you should eat it, but if you have no appetite for it, simply leave it in the dish without criticizing it. This is

both out of respect for the blessing of the food and in order to avoid hurting the feelings of the person who has cooked and/or offered it. It is also preferred to eat with others and not alone, either by eating with your family or by inviting a poor person to join you. Say *Bismillah* (In the name of Allah [I start]) before beginning to eat, and say *Alhamdulillah* (All praise is due to Allah) after the meal, in order to remember the blessing that you have been given and also the One Who provided it. The Prophet (bpuh) prohibited people from blowing on food or drink or breathing onto it, out of respect for others who may be sharing it and to avoid the spread of contagious diseases.

3.7 Hygiene — Islamic moral conduct

Islam also enjoins both physical and spiritual cleanliness. It encourages us to keep our bodies clean, along with our clothes and shoes. Islam has guided Muslims for our own well-being, down to the minute details. For example, we are encouraged to wash thoroughly after using the toilet, to clean the teeth often (especially with the *siwak*, a natural toothbrush), and to shower after having sexual relations.

3.8 Spiritual — Islamic moral conduct

In regard to spiritual purity, the Quran instructs us to straighten and correct our souls and to purify our hearts from spite, malice, jealousy, pride, and inequity. The Quran calls for integrity of the heart and for love, affection, and humility towards people; it instructs us to purify our tongues from lying, backbiting, slander, and insult, and the enormity of such sins is emphasized

in many of its verses. Chapter 104 (The Slanderer) is dedicated to slander and backbiting, which should be replaced by truthfulness and softness in speech. Islam encourages unity, so much so that we should give as many excuses as we can for suspected bad behaviour or speech on the part of fellow Muslims. The wealth, property, and life of a Muslim are held sacred; no one has the right to interfere with these without the individual's express permission.

> We should restrain our eyes from looking at what they are not entitled to (such as the private parts of others), and we should keep our ears from listening to loose and immoral talk, including lewd song lyrics.
>
> The Quran praises and encourages knowledge and criticizes ignorance, saying that it leads to destruction. It commands people to action and dynamism, while prohibiting wasteful talk and laziness.

3.9 Family structure and rights

Islam teaches that children should be born within a legal marriage and that sexual desire should be controlled and contained within these parameters.

> To uphold the family structure and the well-being of society, the Quran prohibits fornication because it is one of the worst assaults on a person's honour and dignity. It can cause disease and produce children who are looked upon by society as 'illegitimate'. Likewise, the Quran forbids everything which leads to fornication, so it prohibits behaviour like looking at pornographic

pictures and being alone with members of the opposite sex who are not *mahrams*.[16] It also commands that men lower their gaze and not look or stare at women whom they have no right to look at. Muslim women thus enjoy protection and security and can be confident that Muslim men will not even look at them if they are not permitted to. Likewise, women should not gaze at men unlawfully.

3.10 Decency and veiling

With this same reasoning, Islam enjoins morality in behaviour and appearance. Fashions that reduce women to sex objects are not acceptable, and Islamic veiling is a means of protection from unwanted external attention. Allah says in the Quran:

{O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused…}

(Quran 33: 59)

In the privacy of their own homes and in the presence of their husbands, when they will receive only the type of attention they desire, women may wear whatever they wish.

[16] *mahram*: a man with whom marriage is not permitted; for example, a woman's brother or father. Non-mahram men are those whom a woman is permitted to marry.

3.11 The rights of the wife

Islam urges men to be kind to their wives. Allah says in the Quran:

{...He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy...} *(Quran 30: 21)*

Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) said:

«The best of you are those who are kindest to their wives.»

(Recorded by Ibn Majah with a sound chain of narration)

Some people are kind in public where everyone is watching, yet they are mean and cruel at home. Islam holds Muslims accountable even in this situation, where their true nature may be revealed. This is the true test of moral behaviour.

In Islam, the wife retains her independent legal status and family name. She is not the property of her husband in any way, but she has many rights due from him, as he does from her.

The husband must give his wife a gift at the time of marriage, and this is hers to keep even if she is later divorced. The wife does not give a dowry to the husband, and she is never obliged to act as a co-provider for the family, although she may do so voluntarily. It is the husband's sole responsibility to support his family financially. Islam gives women (whether married, divorced, or single) the right to inherit and own property and to conduct business.

3.12 Polygyny

Polygyny (a man's having more than one wife) is permitted in Islam, especially to alleviate social problems such as the plight of orphans and widows who need support. It is also a way to safeguard honesty and matrimonial trustworthiness (especially within the family) for those who have a desire or need for more than one sexual partner; instead of having an extramarital affair, the man is required to take responsibility for his actions. Islam limits polygyny to a maximum of four wives at one time, and it requires the husband to treat them equally, caring for his wives financially and emotionally in the exact same manner. It should be noted that if a woman is unhappy in this situation, and she fears that she will be unable to fulfil her responsibilities to her husband as well as to Allah, she can opt out of the marriage. A man is not allowed to force his wife to stay married.

3.13 Divorce rules

Islam is a religion of moderation. Although divorce is allowed when necessary, family unity is encouraged. For example, in the event of a divorce, the two spouses are encouraged to bring arbitrators from their family members to help reconcile them. Islam discourages divorce, yet it recognizes the rights of both partners to end their matrimonial relationship if circumstances dictate it. Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) said:

«A believing man should not hate a believing woman. If he dislikes one of her traits, he will be pleased with another.»

(Recorded by Muslim)

Therefore Islam is realistic about the option of divorce, but it also encourages attempts to resolve any conflicts and hold the marriage together.

3.14 Protection of life

The Quran also calls for the protection and sanctity of human life, specifically mentioning that the taking of an innocent life is one of the worst and most hideous crimes. The Prophet (bpuh) forbade breaking the bones of a dead person, so what about the taking of an innocent life? The Quran prescribes 'a life for a life' and 'an eye for an eye' for all killings and injuries (large or small) respectively, unless the victims or their families agree to accept financial compensation instead.

3.15 Protection of property

The Quran declares that a person's property and wealth are safe and inviolable; therefore, it prohibits theft, bribery, usury, and deception. It calls for moderation in spending; hence it forbids extravagance, lavishness, and squandering money, while at the same time forbidding the hoarding and amassing of wealth. It calls for balance; people should neither be greedy, stingy, and covetous nor extravagant and wasteful. It encourages people to seek their livelihoods and provisions through lawful activities that bring financial or material benefit to all parties concerned, such as buying, selling, and leasing.

3.16 Animal rights

The Prophet (bpuh) ordered that animals be treated fairly and with kindness, instructing that they should be fed and given water. He promised that such actions would be rewarded on the Day of Resurrection. He also instructed that they should not be made to carry a burden more than they can bear, tormented or caused undue suffering, or killed (unless they were harmful). If an animal is to be slaughtered as food, it should not be slaughtered in front of other animals since this would cause them anguish.

3.17 Maintaining health

Islam promotes good health and therefore commands that only wholesome and nutritious food be eaten, and eaten in moderation. Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) warned against overeating, saying:

«No man fills a container worse than his stomach. A few morsels that keep his back upright are sufficient for him. If he has to, then he should keep one-third for food, one-third for drink, and one-third for his breathing.» (A sound hadith recorded by Tirmidhi)

Islam prohibits the consumption of all harmful food and drink such as pork, carrion, tobacco, alcohol and other intoxicants (mind-altering substances), and so forth.

{He has only forbidden to you **dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine**, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing

[its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.} *(Quran 2: 173)*

In the past, pork was known to carry the risk of trichinosis, a disease caused by parasitic roundworms usually found in undercooked pork. Today, some consider this risk to be low, since food safety standards are more advanced, but in fact, pork still may be harmful. In its January 2013 issue, *Consumer Reports* published an article titled, "Pork Chops and Ground Pork Contaminated with Bacteria," which began:

> Our analysis of pork-chop and ground-pork samples from around the U.S. found that yersinia enterocolitica, a bacterium that can cause fever, diarrhea, and abdominal pain, was widespread. Some samples harbored other potentially harmful bacteria, including salmonella...
>
> Some of the bacteria we found in 198 samples proved to be resistant to antibiotics commonly used to treat people. The frequent use of low-dose antibiotics in pork farming may be accelerating the growth of drug-resistant "superbugs" that threaten human health.

The dangers of tobacco are well known. A fact sheet at the World Health Organization website states that tobacco kills six million people a year (including 600,000 from the effects of second-hand smoke, which causes "serious cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, including coronary heart disease and lung cancer"). Up to half of all tobacco users will die from a tobacco-related disease.

{O you who have believed, indeed, **intoxicants**, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone altars [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful.} *(Quran 5: 90)*

As for alcohol, its dangers are also well documented. The World Health Organization's fact sheet on alcohol explains that, "Worldwide, 3.3 million deaths every year result from harmful use of alcohol, this represent [*sic*] 5.9% of all deaths." Alcohol is also described as "a causal factor in more than 200 disease and injury conditions," including "a range of mental and behavioural disorders, other noncommunicable conditions as well as injuries" and infectious diseases. Current medical advice often refers to "moderate drinking" as being safe for some people, and news reports even cite some benefits from "moderate" drinking. Allah addressed this argument when He informed us:

{They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit...} *(Quran 2: 219)*

Islam also prescribes fasting, which has many benefits for the body, especially the digestive system.

3.18 Rights of the deceased

Islam maintains respect for a person even after death. When a Muslim dies, he or she must be buried according to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad

(bpuh). The body of the person is washed and perfumed. After that, it is wrapped in an unstitched white cloth shroud, and the body is buried facing the Kaaba (the House of Allah in Makkah, originally built by Prophets Abraham and Ishmael).

We are advised to hold the deceased's body gently to ensure that its bones do not break. Before and after the burial, people are encouraged to pray that Allah forgive the deceased and admit him or her into paradise. Islam prohibits sitting on or walking over a grave, in another sign of respect for the dead.

4. FEATURES OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS

Allah has made the message of Islam easy to understand and to follow. He annulled some previously prescribed rites and practices, while he affirmed others, according to His wisdom. As a result, the Islamic creed and law are suited to people's spiritual, psychological, social, and economic needs, for all of humankind and for all eras. Islamic teachings have the following unique features:

4.1 Rationality

The truth should be clear and obvious. It should be so simple that anyone is capable of seeing it, and this clarity is the most compelling feature of Islam. One should not have to work through a series of complicated logical proofs in order to derive a fundamental principle, only to arrive at something that he or she is unsure of—yet this is often the case with other religions or philosophies.

4.2 Perfection

Since Allah is perfect, His teachings must also be perfect and free from any contradiction or error. The Quran challenges its readers to find any errors in it if they do not believe it is really from Allah:

{Then do they not reflect upon the Quran? If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction.} *(Quran 4: 82)*

> Dr Maurice Bucaille, a French surgeon, found many scientific facts mentioned in the Quran that were not known by humans at the time Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) was conveying these verses to those around him. Dr Bucaille wrote, "I could not find a single error in the Quran."[17] As a result of his findings, he left Christianity and embraced Islam.

4.3 Clarity

Allah is the Most Compassionate. He therefore guides people through clear and simple revelations that are free of myths, superstitions, and mysteries.

4.4 Scientific validity and accuracy

It is not surprising to find in the Quran, and in the statements of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh), information that has only recently been discovered by modern science. This indicates that the Quran is the word of Allah and that Muhammad (bpuh) is His messenger. On the other hand, the religious views which the church presented concerning God, the Bible, and the individual's relation to God forced people into an unfortunate choice: either science or God. Many educated people have concluded that one cannot be a scientist or an educated person and be a true Christian at the same time. Many philosophers and scientists, and the majority of lay people, have lost

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[17] Bucaille, *The Quran and Modern Science*.

hope of reconciling religion and science; thus, the ideology of secularism was developed and has since flourished. This dichotomy would not have arisen if the original scripture that was revealed to Jesus (pbuh) had not been distorted. Islam, the pure religion, raises no contradictions whatsoever between religion and science. This is naturally obvious because both religion and true scientific knowledge are from the same source: Allah, the Exalted, who does not contradict Himself.[18]

4.5 Prophetic fulfilment

Many of the events prophesied in the Quran and in the Prophet's statements have come to pass. This is further proof that Islam is not a man-made religion, because it would be unimaginable for an uneducated man who was living isolated from other civilizations to make up such prophecies; they must have been revealed to him by Allah.

4.6 Moderation

In Islam, there is no conflict between spiritual and worldly life. Rather, it provides a balance among all aspects of human life, taking into account the needs and wants of individuals and society. Therefore, secularism, materialism, monasticism, and extreme asceticism are all rejected by Islam, which provides a

[18] For more information on the many scientific facts that are referenced in the Quran, see *The Quran and Modern Science* by Dr Maurice Bucaille and *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam* by I. A. Ibrahim (available online at www.islam-guide.com).

middle way to achieve harmony and balance between the spiritual and material needs of people. This is why Allah has called the Muslim nation a:

{...just community [moderate nation]...} *(Quran 2: 143)*

4.7 Comprehensiveness

Islamic teachings provide people with definite guidelines to follow in all aspects of life: spiritual, individual, social, moral, political, economic, and so on.

4.8 Uniqueness

Some have claimed that the Quran is man-made; Allah challenges them to:

{...produce a chapter the like thereof...} *(Quran 2: 23)*

> Indeed, the entire Quran—its language, its elegance, its miraculous nature—is unparalleled. The ancient non-Muslim Arabs tried to construct a verse yet failed, even though their language and poetry were very highly developed in that era. Even many recent non-Muslim scholars admit that the Quran is one of the greatest books known to humankind. This point ultimately leads to the fact that Muhammad (bpuh)—the illiterate—was a true prophet to whom the Quran was revealed.

4.9 Justice

All of humankind descended from one man and one woman (Adam and Eve). Islam teaches that the

criterion by which all human beings are judged is righteousness, not the colour of their skin or their status in society. In the view of Allah, the best person is the most righteous. A verse of the glorious Quran reads:

{…Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you…} *(Quran 49: 13)*

CONCLUSION

The various aspects of the Islamic moral system are amazing. This is because, as we said in the introduction, it is based on revealed teachings, as opposed to teachings developed by human beings.

Many volumes have been written on this subject. As an author, I hope I have given you enough insight to encourage and enable you to read more and more about this great religion.

May the light of truth shine in our minds and in our hearts. May it lead us to peace and certitude in this life and eternal bliss in the hereafter.

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APPENDIX

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GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS[19]

alhamdulillah	all praise is due to Allah
bismillah	in the name of Allah
hadith	a statement or action of Prophet Muhammad (bpuh) that was remembered and recorded by his Companions and followers
Hajj	the major pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque, site of the Kaaba in Makkah, to be undertaken by every able Muslim once in his or her lifetime
Kaaba	the House of Allah in Makkah, originally built by Prophets Abraham and Ishmael
mahram	a degree of consanguinity precluding marriage; a man whom a woman may not marry due to the close blood or marriage relationship, e.g., her father, brother, son, uncle, or father-in-law
Sharia	Islamic law derived from the Quran and the statements and actions of the Prophet (bpuh)
siwak (or *miswak*)	a small twig (*usu*. of the *arak* tree) used as a natural toothbrush

[19] If a word has become part of the English language (i.e., is found in a dictionary of Standard English), that spelling is used in this book.